**Meeting Minutes - Destination Groton Committee (DGC) Meeting**

**Meeting Date:** January 8, 2025

**Attendees:**

* **Committee Members:** Greg Sheldon, Jeff Gordon, Joni Parker-Roach, Brian Bolton, Heather Puksta
* **Guests:** Karen Tucker-Barisano,

**Meeting Summary:** The Destination Groton Committee convened to discuss critical initiatives and updates for the town, including budget and grant management, marketing strategies, and infrastructure planning. Key decisions centered on the scope of a $25,000 technical assistance grant, traffic and infrastructure studies, and updates on upcoming events and grants. The meeting underscored the importance of a clear vision for the town center and efficient grant management practices.

**Key Takeaways**

1. **Grant Management:** Need for a clear distinction between writing and managing grants, with concerns raised about team bandwidth.
2. **Town Center Vision:** Emphasis on creating a master plan for future infrastructure and commercial development.
3. **Traffic Studies:** Focus on Route 40 and 119 infrastructure needs, with a $25,000 technical assistance grant discussed.
4. **Marketing Efforts:** Audio tour and lecture funding secured ($5,000 grant), with production and distribution strategies underway.
5. **Economic Development:** Discussions on leveraging the leakage study to guide retail and commercial development.
6. **Community Initiatives:** Support for projects like the Top Secret Orchard wedding venue plan and preservation of agricultural land.

**Action Items**

* By Monday: Provide comments/edits on the technical assistance grant scope of work to Stantec.
* By January 15: Complete the quarterly report for the Rural Development Fund grant.
* Review: Centralized Google Drive folder for grant-related documents and marketing archives.
* By Friday: Submit comments on the 3-page visioning document.
* Ongoing: Circulate audio tour recordings for feedback and finalize production costs.

**Meeting Minutes Breakdown**

1. **Budget and Financial Updates**

* The committee reviewed the current budget status, noting an $11,500 balance remaining for the fiscal year. There was discussion about allocating part of these funds toward the Spring Groton town meeting and marketing efforts.
* Members highlighted the financial achievements of raising $165,000 over three years while spending $36,000, showcasing a strong return on investment. The importance of leveraging this success in future funding applications was emphasized.
* Concerns were raised about potential budget cuts, and members explored strategies for utilizing any remaining budget funds to offset deficits if new funding is not secured.

1. **Infrastructure and Traffic Studies**

* The need for an engineering study to address traffic and infrastructure issues along Route 40 and 119 was a central topic. Committee members identified a $3 million projected cost and discussed the long-term benefits of these investments.
* The scope of the $25,000 technical assistance grant was debated, focusing on whether to prioritize a bite-sized project, such as Station Avenue, or address the entire town center. The committee agreed on the importance of presenting a clear vision for the town’s future.

1. **Marketing and Event Planning**

* Members discussed the audio tour and lecture project, noting that a $5,000 grant had been secured to support these efforts. Ideas for promoting the tour included using local music to enhance the experience and collaborating with Groton Channel to reduce production costs.
* The committee reviewed marketing statistics from the past year, including 60,301 website views and a 36% email open rate, which they agreed demonstrated strong engagement. These metrics will inform upcoming marketing strategies for town events.
* Preparations for the Spring Groton town meeting were highlighted, with marketing identified as a critical component to ensure robust attendance and community involvement.

1. **Subcommittee Formation**

* Five subcommittees were proposed: infrastructure, development, sustainability, grant writing, and marketing. The committee discussed potential members for each, identifying individuals with relevant expertise.
* It was noted that volunteers will be needed to manage existing grants and assist with new applications. The committee agreed on the importance of maintaining flexibility in roles, with some members floating between subcommittees as needed.

1. **Grant Writing and Management**

* Members emphasized the need for a clear distinction between grant writing and grant management, with concerns raised about team bandwidth given current and upcoming commitments.
* The idea of creating a centralized repository for grant-related materials, including writing samples, photographs, and reports, was revisited. The committee agreed that better organization would streamline efforts and improve efficiency.
* Discussion also covered the timeline and requirements for the $50,000 Rural Development Fund grant, with members agreeing to issue an RFP and define a matrix for prioritizing future infrastructure investments.

1. **Economic Development and Land Use**

* The committee discussed a 10-year vision for a 37,000 square foot town center development. Members debated whether to pursue the full scope or focus on a subset, with consensus forming around a phased, step-by-step approach.
* Results from the leakage study were reviewed, highlighting opportunities to recapture local spending by encouraging new retail and commercial development. Concerns about balancing development with community needs were raised.
* Members expressed support for the proposal to convert Top Secret Orchard into a wedding venue while preserving surrounding agricultural land. The committee agreed to explore ways to assist the couple behind the project, aligning with the Destination Groton mission.